

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 14808 221237Z

43

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 14808

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, PINS, TH, LA

SUBJ: STATUS OF MEO REFUGEES IN NAN PROVINCE

SUMMARY: THERE ARE ALMOST 10,000 MEO REFUGEES FROM LAOS IN NAN PROVINCE. CONDITIONS IN REFUGEE CAMPS ARE EXTREMELY POOR AND THERE HAVE BEEN DEATHS AMONG THE REFUGEES. LOCAL OFFICIALS ARE TRYING TO ASSIST THE REFUGEES ON THEIR OWN WITH NO FIRM GUIDANCE OR SUPPORT FROM THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT (RTG). END SUMMARY.

1. US CONSULATE OFFICERS FROM CHIANG MAI VISITED PUA DISTRICT OF NAN PROVINCE IN MID-JULY TO SEEK FIRST HAND INFORMATION ON THE STATUS OF THE MEO (MORE CORRECTLY KNOWN AS H'MONG OR MUONG) REFUGEES WHO HAVE ENTERED THE PROVINCE FROM LAOS.

2. PUA DISTRICT CHIEF SOMCHAI PHOLLAWAANG AND SEVERAL INTERNAL SECURITY OPERATIONS COMMAND (ISOC) OFFICERS ESTIMATED THAT THERE ARE CURRENTLY 4,000 MEO REFUGEES FROM LAOS IN PUA DISTRICT, 5,000 IN THE MAE CHARIM DISTRICT AND 200-300 IN THE CHIANG KLANG DISTRICT. MOST OF THESE HAVE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 14808 221237Z

BEEN ABLE TO BUILD TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATIONS OF THATCH AND

PLASTIC SHEETING, BUT THERE ARE SEVERE SHORTAGES OF FOOD AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES. TO DATE THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE OR NO SUPPORT FROM THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT EXCEPT WHAT HAS BEEN SPENT BY LOCAL DISTRICT OFFICERS FROM THEIR MUNICIPAL BUDGETS. MALARIA AND DYSENTERY ARE THE TWO WORST HEALTH PROBLEMS AS WELL AS BRONCHIAL CONDITIONS FROM SLEEPING IN THE OPEN OR ON WET GROUND. AT LEAST 14 REFUGEES HAVE DIED IN PUA AND ABOUT 24 IN MAE CHARIM. (COMMENT: A LEADER OF THE REFUGEE GROUP IN MAE CHARIM SENT A LETTER TO THE DISTRICT CHIEF ON JUNE 23 REPORTING 100 DEATHS IN HIS GROUP.)

3. IN PUA THE REFUGEES HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY DISTRICT CHIEF SOMCHAI WHO HAS SPENT MUCH OF HIS DISTRICT BUDGET TO FEED AND SUPPLY MEDICINES TO THE MEO. THE DISTRICT OFFICER WAS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT FUTURE SUPPORT BY THE RTG FOR THE PERMANENT RESETTLEMENT OF THESE REFUGEES IN AN AND BELIEVES THAT ALL REFUGEES WILL BE WELCOMED IN THAILAND BY THE RTG. ABOUT 200 OF THE MEO IN PUA HAVE BEEN HIRED AS DAY LABORERS IN LOCAL FARMS OR BY THE DISTRICT FOR WORK IN LOCAL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS. SOMCHAI STATED THAT ON 8 JULY, GENERAL SAIYUT KERDPHON, INTERNAL SECURITY OPERATIONS COMMAND COMMANDER FROM BANGKOK, VISITED PUA TO EXAMINE THE REFUGEE SITUATION. SAIYUT ALSO TALKED WITH MISSIONARY GROUPS WHO WERE DEALING WITH THE REFUGEES. SOMCHAI STATED THAT SAIYUT SAID THAT HE WOULD DO WHAT HE COULD FOR THE REFUGEES FROM THE ISOC BUDGET.

4. ACCORDING TO AN OFFICER ATTACHEE TO THE NAN ISOC OFFICE, RTG POLICY WAS ONLY TO ACCEPT THE REFUGEES ON A TEMPORARY BASIS UNTIL NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF LAOS COULD BE UNDERTAKEN FOR THEIR RETURN TO LAOS. THIS OFFICIAL STATED THAT GROUPS OF REFUGEES HAVE BEEN DISCOURAGED FROM ENTERING THAILAND AT THE BORDER BY ROYAL THAI ARMY (RTA) ELEMENTS. (COMMENT: JOINT SECURITY CENTER (JSC)/5 IN CHIANG MAI REPORTING FOR JUNE INDICATES THAT ALTHOUGH SOME MEO REFUGEE GROUPS HAVE BEEN ALLOWED ENTRY INTO THAILAND, THERE WERE FOUR OCCASIONS WHEN RTA UNITS IN NAN DISARMED AND TURNED BACK MEO REFUGEES AT THE BORDER. ONE GROUP OF 200, WHO ARRIVED FROM THE LONG TIENG AREA ON 3 JUNE AT

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANGKO 14808 221237Z

QA 2164, WERE DISARMED AND TURNED BACK ON 6 JUNE. THE GROUP, HOWEVER, RETURNED ON 10 JUNE AND WERE ALLOWED ENTRY. JSC/5 REPORTING INDICATES THAT OVER 2,000 REFUGEES ARRIVED IN PUA DURING JUNE.)

5. BORDER PATROL POLICE CHIEF IN NORTHERN THAILAND, COLONEL PHAIROTE, TOLD A CONSULATE OFFICER IN CHIANG MAI THAT IN HIS OPINION THE LONG-RANGE POLICY GOAL OF THE RTG IS THE

EVENTUAL RETURN OF THE MEO REFUGEES TO LAOS. HOWEVER, THE RTG IS PREPARED TO ALLOW THE MEO TO REMAIN IN THAILAND UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THEY ARE REASONABLY SURE THAT THE CURRENT LAOTIAN GOVERNMENT WILL RECIEVE THEM BACK WITHOUT ENGAGING IN MASS ASSASSINATIONS OR MISTREATMENT OF THE REFUGEES. IN THIS REGARD, PHAIROTE CITED THE EXAMPLE OF THE KHMER COMMUNIST TREATMENT OF RETURNING REFUGEES WHO WERE KILLED ON THEIR RETURN TO CAMBODIA. PHAIROTE STATED THAT THE MEO REFUGEE SITUATION IS A PROBLEM WHICH WILL HAVE TO BE SOLVED AT THE STATE LEVEL BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE RTG AND THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE NATIONAL UNION (PGNU). HE REMARKED THAT THE COMMUNIST ELEMENTS WITHIN THE PGNU HAVE A NATURAL DISTRUST OF THE MEO REFUGEES WHO SUPPORTED THE FORMER GOVERNMENT DURING THE HOSTILITIES BETWEEN THE COMMUNISTS AND THE GOVERNMENT FORCES.

6. PHAIROTE STATED THAT NO MATTER WHAT THAI INTENTIONS MIGHT BE WITH REGARD TO THE MEO REFUGEE PROBLEM, THE PGNU'S PERCEPTION OF THE THAI POLICY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR FOR THE FUTURE. HE CITED THE RECENT REQUEST BY THE PGNU EMBASSY IN BANGKOK TO RECALL THAI CONSULATE PERSONNEL FROM RTG CONSULATES IN PAKSE, SAVANNAKHET AND HOUAI SAI AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE PGNU'S DISTRUST OF BOTH THE MEO AND THAIS. (THE PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED REASON FOR THIS REQUEST WAS PGNU CONCERN FOR THE SAFETY OF THESE CONSULAR OFFICERS BECAUSE MANY PGNU OFFICIALS AND PL FORCES BELIEVE THE RTG WAS SUPPORTING THE MEO TO ATTACK AREAS OF SAYABOURY PROVINCE, LAOS.)

7. IN SUM, PHAIROTE BELIEVED THAT NO SIMPLE SOLUTION TO THE REFUGEE PROBLEM HAS BEEN FORMULATED. WITH REGARD TO SUPPORT FOR THE REFUGEES, PHAIROTE STATED THAT THE NAN GOVERNOR HAD REQUESTED EMERGENCY FUNDS FROM THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR BECAUSE THE CURRENT PROVINCIAL BUDGET HAD BEEN ALLOCATED

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BANGKO 14808 221237Z

FOR OTHER PURPOSES. AS OF 12 JULY, THE EMERGENCY FUNDS HAD NOT BEEN ALLOCATED. IN THIS REGARD, PHAIROTE COMMENTED THAT THE ALLOCATION OF SUCH EMERGENCY FUNDS PRESENTED REAL PROBLEMS FOR THE RTG IN THAT IF THESE FUNDS WERE TO BE ALLOCATED, THIS WOULD PROVIDE THE PGNU WITH EVIDENCE THAT THE RTG WAS SUPPORTING (ALBEIT IN A HUMANITARIAN SENSE) THE MEO WHOM THE PGNU REGARDS AS A POTENTIAL INSURGENT GROUP IN LAOS.

8. COMMENT: THE PICTURE REPRESENTED IS CERTAINLY ONE OF AN ABSENCE OF FIRM RTG POLICY TOWARD THE MEO REFUGEES. THE PROBLEM IS A VERY DIFFICULT ONE FOR THE RTG OFFICIALS INVOLVED IN NAN PROVINCE. SHOULD THE APPROXIMATELY 13,000 MEO CURRENTLY SITUATED AT NAM PHONG BASE BE TRANSFERRED TO NAN, THE PROBLEM WILL BE INTENSIFIED DRASTICALLY. FOR THOSE

MEO NOW IN NAN, THERE IS AN URGENT NEED FOR MEDICAL CARE
AND FOOD.
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